

MEETING & MEASURING



Trends within the
United Church of Christ's
New Ministries
& Communities



MEETING & MEASURING

Trends within the United Church of Christ's
New Ministries & Communities



An analysis of the applications for the 2019 cycle of the
New and Renewing Church Grant. These trends are reflective
of how vital communities of faith are engaging
their communities and themselves.



PURPOSE, VISION, & MISSION: The United Church of Christ

The purpose statement from the Gospel of Matthew:

To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength
and our neighbor as ourselves.

The vision:

United in Christ's love, a just world for all.

The mission statement:

United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace,
we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.

Meeting & Measuring:

Trends within the United Church of Christ's New Ministries & Communities

Each year, the United Church of Christ has roughly about \$350,000 to distribute in support of leadership development through new church plants and spiritual communities, as well as to established churches with a clear plan and process of renewal.

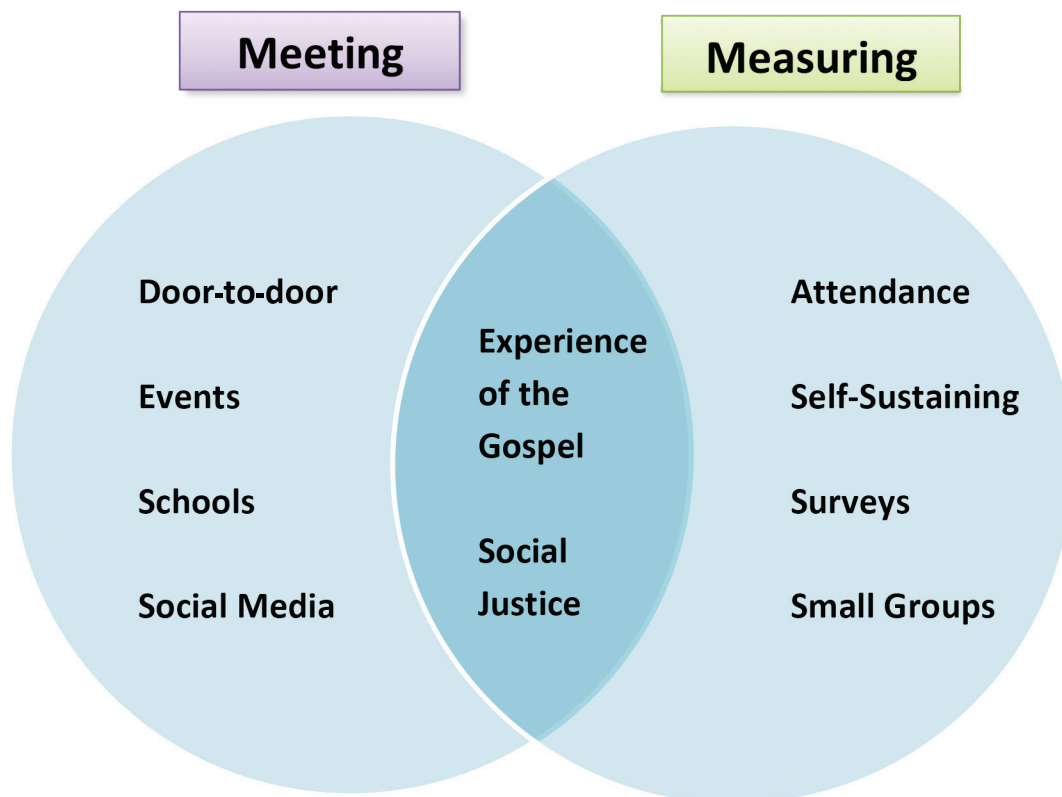
THE CURRENT PROCESS IS AS FOLLOWS:

- The application process opens in late spring
- Prep webinars are available, recorded and planned, offered at www.ucc.org/grow-your-church
- There are virtual communal office hours for questions posted at www.ucc.org/grow-your-church
- The deadline for applications is the first Friday in September
- A diverse team of evaluators from across the life of the United Church of Christ reviews applications and makes recommendations based on the vision, mission and purpose of the United Church of Christ, and the values of Love, Spirituality/Faith, Community, Justice, and Creativity
- Grantees are chosen and notified
- They receive:
 - Coaching in alignment with their goals
 - Financial support
 - National recognition, networking and support

Using data from all the congregations and spiritual communities that apply for a New and Renewing Spiritual Communities grant, we are able to identify several trends. This application cycle, we paid particular attention on how new congregations *meet their communities* and the metrics by which they *measure their success*. The following report focuses on these trends, and invites you to consider how they may be effective in your context and congregation.

Our study consisted of the congregations and communities that self-selected into the granting process. This narrows the lens a bit, but does give an indication of those places where hope is present and self-identified into something innovative and new.

MEETING AND MEASURING AT A GLANCE



Many congregations listed their explicit congregational or Christian presence in community events as both a place where they meet people, and how they measure their success in follow up conversations and connections.

MEETING

One are the days when people will walk into the church building for services because it's the closest one and they have an expectation of joining and contributing to the congregational system. Communities are intentional about getting ready to meet their neighbors, beyond the assumption of their neighbors having the inherent desire to meet the church. Instead, congregations have to be intentional about who is around them, who they are called to serve, how their work is in alignment with the mission that God has for them, and the people God is calling them to be.

Across the categories of meeting people, the most utilized was individual engagement (for example: door-to-door outreach, prayer walks, and direct connection). Following this, congregations sought partnerships with local interfaith and/or ecumenical groups to engage people across missional platforms. Finally, the third most oft cited method of meeting people was through intentional study of demographic research.

Based on our research, the input of these congregations, and best practices, a congregation seeking to be intentional about how to fit within the community where it is located could consider some of the following methods:

- Prayer walks, wherein a habit of walking about the block and praying for who is seen and what is witnessed is maintained
- Appreciative inquiry of people who are associated with the congregation
- Meet and greet and/or interviews with local shopkeepers
- Connection to local government officials, school boards, and/or clubs
- Technological opportunities, such as: meet-up groups, community Facebook groups, or local instagram
- Be present for community concerns in justice arenas, with a faith voice
- Intentionally target programing/marketing towards a specific demographic (with empowered program leaders reflecting that demographic)
- Community office hours (such as in a coffee shop or brewery) wherein people are visibly part of the congregation and inviting conversation.

Rev. Rebecca Anderson says, "Don't be afraid to be specific. Do the thing you do best, serve the community you know and love, and don't be ashamed to serve them specifically and with excellence." Further, she says that she gets as specific as she wants in programming for younger adults, and people will show up and support the work. We note that this church has particularly effective targeted, intentional, and relevant marketing across multiple platforms. (Gilead UCC)

One congregation drew heavily on trauma informed care in order to position their inquiry into the local community and mentioned the six key principles as: safety, trustworthiness, transparency, peer support (collaboration and mutuality), empowerment (voice and choice) and sensitivity to cultural, historical and gender issues. (Cathedral in the Night)

Ways of Meeting Across Grant Applications	% of Applications
Individual Engagement (e.g., going door-to-door)	49.1
Demographic Data	38.6
Ecumenical/Interfaith Partnerships	38.6
Experience of the Gospel in the Community and Events	36.8
Meeting People in Educational System (primary, secondary, and college)	31.6
Being Known for Social Justice	29.8
Media/Social Media	22.8
Outreach to Specific Demographics (e.g. youth)	22.8
Community Partnerships	21.1
Connections with Government	15.8
Marketing	15.8
Attending Community Events to Meet People	14.0
Overlap of Work and Congregation (e.g., food bank)	14.0
Inviting a Friend to Worship, Referrals	10.3
Community Ministry in Crisis (including prison ministry)	8.8
Market Competition Research	8.8
Holding Office Hours (e.g. at a café)	5.3
Meetup Group	5.3
Home Invitations	1.8
Talking to Local Families	1.8

QUESTIONS:

- How does your congregation reach outside of itself to meet people?
- Who is leading those efforts? How do you contribute?
- Which of the above suggestions are relevant and achievable in your context?
- What current practices of intentional engagement do you use?
- What happens when people start showing up? What kind of welcome is present, or not? How do you incorporate their ideas and wisdom into your current system, or not?

Rev. Christie Burns of West Parish of Barnstable often has the barista write the theme of the day or the week on her cup!



MEASURING

In Gil Rendle's book, *Doing the Math of Mission*, he describes the difference between COUNTING and MEASURING¹. It's easy to count things, but making meaning of them and applying that meaning towards the mission of the organization is a different story. For example, traditional metrics of measurement of success are:

- Number of people
 - In the pews
 - On the books
 - Baptised, confirmed, or joined as members
- Money
 - Balanced budget
 - Missional outreach
 - OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission), or donation towards the covenantal relationships that sustain the denomination.

¹ Gil Rendle, *Doing the Math of Mission: Fruits, Faithfulness, and Metrics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

Ways of Measuring Across Grant Applications	% of Applications
Attendance	63.2
Radical Welcome	57.9
Self-Sustaining	47.4
Small Groups	42.1
Social Justice Action	42.1
Experience of the Gospel in the Community and Events	36.8
Partnerships with Other Organizations	36.8
Generational Diversity in Worship or Programming	35.1
Leadership Development	35.1
Surveys	29.8
Weekly Worship Happenings	24.6
Cross-Pollination Between Church and Community	22.8
Number of People in Worship	21.1
Acquiring Space	21.1
Scaling	19.3
Goods and Services	17.9
Interfaith	15.8
Worship Band	15.8
Language	14.0
Program Evaluation	14.0
Retreats	14.0
Employment	14.0
Carbon Footprint Reduction	7.0
Self-Governing	5.3
Mailing List	5.3
Giving Out Money	3.5

While these are important, we know they don't tell the whole story of transformation and hope in communities. With this in mind, we were attentive to the themes of impact measurement beyond the people and the money. It is important to note that impact measurement is also contextual: for example, if your congregation is in an area where the average age nearby is retirement and older, it does not make sense to measure the impact of the children's programming.

Churches measured their impact inside the service by accounting for the number of people who showed up because of the explicit radical welcome that the congregation was public about. For example, if a congregation has a rainbow flag displayed, then people will ask questions and engage in conversation, often finding a different kind of Christianity as a result.

Other key measurements of impact included:

- The presence and vitality of small group ministries
- Social justice engagement inside and outside the congregations
- Showing up as explicitly Christian to community events of importance (e.g. church t-shirts at Pride)
- Formation of partnerships with organizations that are mission-aligned but not explicitly Christian
- The presence of generational diversity in planning
- Intentional lay leadership development for key positions in congregational life.



Lighthouse UCC marching in Chicago Pride

Measurement of impact is directly related to mission. We measure what matters! For example, a congregation that is highly specific in ministering to young adults in the city measure the **number of times they have helped individual congregants move apartments**. Because making home in a big city is a value to the congregation, this makes perfect sense to see how often they can help individuals feel community in a new location. (Gilead UCC)

Church of the Wild in DC has tied their impact to the collective goal of reducing their carbon footprint. They track and measure how much they are able to reduce their carbon footprint, having gone down by 30% in the last 20 years, and aiming to go down by 15% more in the next three years. This example clearly illustrates the time and investment it takes to measure impact. **Once a congregation has chosen what is important to them to measure, it then must stick with it, as change is a slow process.**

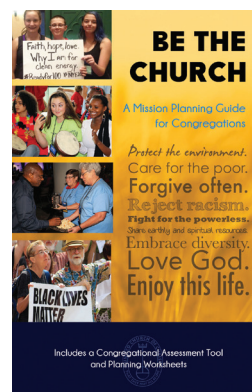
Other unique measurements that congregations have tied their success to include: the measured sobriety of the members (as support through addiction is a value of the congregation,) and the expressed degree of loneliness in the community.

Another example is in a program like the [Adese Fellowship](#) of the United Church of Christ and Church Building and Loan Fund, which ties the success of the spiritual entrepreneurs to the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#).



Further, one tracking piece that the United Church of Christ is beginning to use more universally for this missional engagement time period is alignment with the love of God enacted through the Three Great Loves: Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, and Love of Creation.

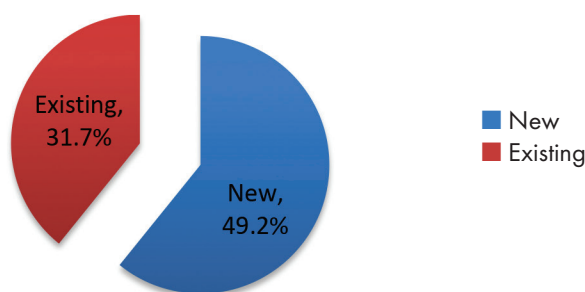
If your congregation is ready to start creatively measuring impact, a tool is found in the Be The Church Mission Planning Guide, available for free at ucc.org/bethechurch.

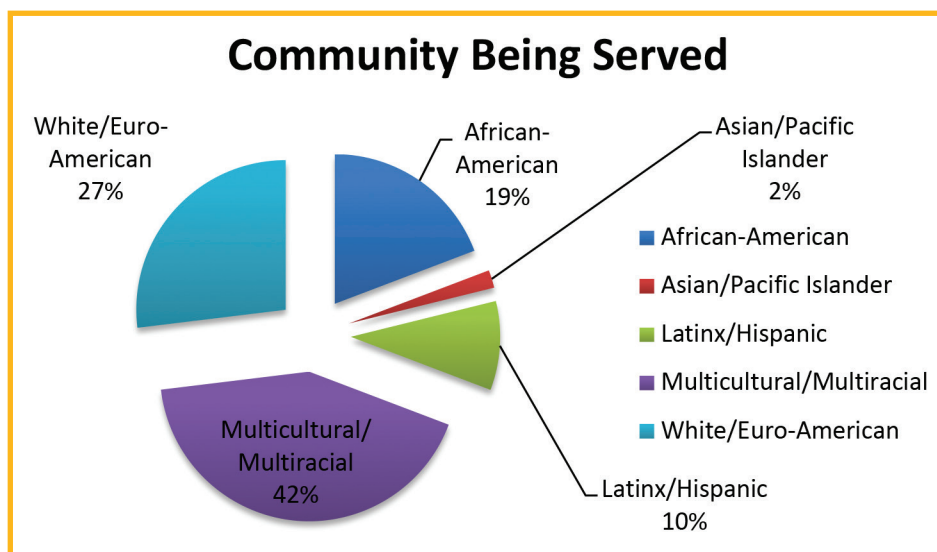


QUESTIONS:

- What does your congregation measure? What does it tell you about what's important to your congregation?
- What else might be important to note for your congregation over the next few years of your church's life?
- What does your community measure? How does it align with your congregation's metrics?
- How does your congregation enact God's love through the love of neighbor, children, and creation?

Grant Applications from New or Existing Communities

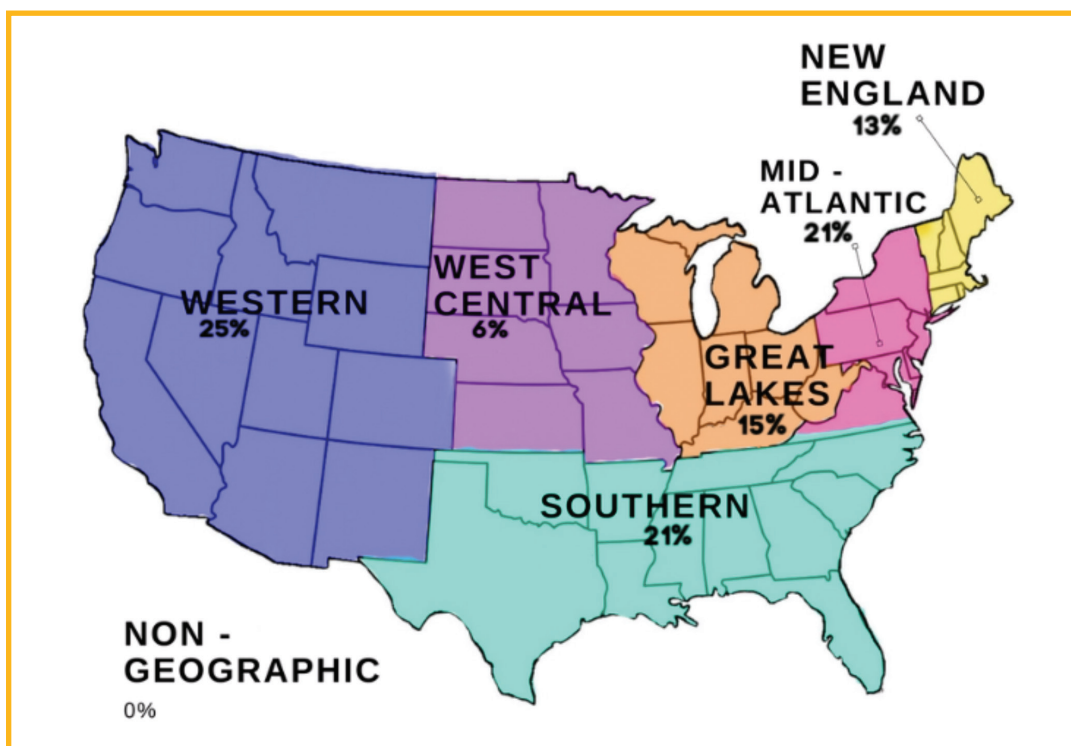




METHODOLOGY

Each application was coded for content themes and demographic data through the work of two coders to ensure reliability of coding. Thematic codes were derived from the applications themselves using grounded theory as a guiding approach. The resulting data was then analyzed in SPSS in order to describe the general patterns across applications. Incomplete applications were included in the analysis where data was available.

Applications were received from the following geographic areas:



INTRODUCTION OF THE 2019 GRANTEES



LIBERATION UCC is a 12-year-old church plant in Seattle, WA, and a multicultural, multiracial, and multigendered congregation that is welcoming to all. Described as a “living breathing example of the kingdom of God on earth,” they reach to the most marginalized through live streamed Sunday services as well as their fellowship opportunities such as: an annual Gospel Drag show, special worship services centering women and/or trans preachers in the last words of Christ, Martin Luther King Day service that calls for continued work against racism and white supremacy, as well as a Watch Night celebrating the emancipation of American slaves.

Learn more at www.mylucc.org.



OPEN CATHEDRAL UCC is a two-year-old new church plant in what was once a small conservative town but is now one of the fastest growing city in the United States. Their mission is to celebrate diversity and community; empower wonder and compassion. Women, people of color, LGBTQ people, people with varied incomes, and people with ability differences have found Open Cathedral to be a welcoming community with open minds, hearts, and faith to love God and EVERYONE. In a city where they are one of the few churches that even allow women to serve in leadership positions, they are proud that women are the majority of leadership committees.

Learn more at www.opencathedral.org.

LIGHTHOUSE CHURCH OF CHICAGO is a 5-year-old church plant called by God to be, “passionate about Jesus and serious about Justice.” Lighthouse is a predominately African American LGBT-inclusive church that welcomes all people. They follow the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus Christ, believing that God has offered the greatest love story in all of human history: the story of a God who has come to us in human form, lived, died, rose, and is soon to come again. From faith, Lighthouse takes serious the call towards Justice. Lighthouse welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, ethnicities, and class—beloved not in spite of the gospel, but because of the gospel. And anywhere they experience -isms or -phobias at work in the world, they commit to work to uproot them, inspired by the example of Christ. Pastor Jamie Frazier says of the Lighthouse Church of Chicago, “It is wonderful to be so utterly supported by all levels of the United Church of Christ, including National! Words cannot express the pleasure and honor it is to pastor the incredible folks at Lighthouse.” Lighthouse has previously received a small start-up grant from the National UCC.

Learn more at www.lighthousechicago.org

GILEAD CHURCH OF CHICAGO is a 2-year-old church full of people who are working to be intersectional in their own commitments and who are grateful for a church that is doing the same. Gilead is a progressive, inclusive community of Christian faith that exists to connect people to God and one another with core practices:

- Make beautiful, creative worship together
- Throw great parties
- Tell true stories that save lives

The people served (who are already Gilead) and those intended to be served (who are not with us yet) are grad students and artists, housing-insecure and comfortable retirees, unemployed and working. Gilead is a unique church as it is housed in bars and the gospel is communicated through storytelling. Pastors Vince Amlin and Rebecca Anderson feed their mission through the real-life-gospel-experience of the stories in the room.

Learn more at www.gileadchicago.org.



JUST LOVE is a of the United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries in Houston, Texas. At inception in 2014, the pastor and core team gathered around this understanding of self: “We are an ever-evolving community of visionaries and dreamers journeying together to create an intentionally inclusive faith community that is fully committed to be the transformative power of love. We are called by God to love boldly, beyond the limits of prejudice, bringing wholeness to our communities.” Just Love seeks to be church with people who have been told, or made to feel, that church is not for them. They make creative, funny, substantive church and preaches the Good News in a way that feels like good news.

Learn more at www.justlovehouston.org.

Founded in 2017, **TAOS UCC** in New Mexico is a progressive Christian community of faith and church plant, grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus and in the historic Christian tradition and are open to people of all faiths and no faith. The community practices radical welcome of all people, all ethnicities and cultural traditions.

Taos UCC was founded to provide grounded and engaged Christian-based spiritual community for those in Taos County who seek such connection. Since their launch in September 2017 we have welcomed individuals and families who are seeking deeper spiritual engagement, a progressive understanding of Christian Faith, opportunities to engage in faith-based direct social action together, and a community where meaningful and honest loving relationships are grown and encouraged. They seek to be a new kind of church, where wounds are healed and all are welcome.

Learn more: www.taosucc.org





URBANMISSION is a United Church of Christ/Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) church in the city of Pomona, California. This ministries collective was established in late 2013 with support from the Southern California Nevada Conference with the intention to co-labor with God and the community as it proclaims and lives out the liberating, and counter-imperial Gospel of Jesus Christ. By partnering with the community to address local challenges and connect community members across socioeconomic boundaries, UrbanMission and its partner nonprofit organization,

UrbanMission Community Partners, provide a conduit to action with God in the world today. UM's Lead Pastor, Rev. Al Lopez says, "Our UCC tradition believes that, 'God is still speaking, and we believe that this is true! Not just to us individually but also to the world at large, through different manifestations of 'being church.' It is a blessing for UM to be church alongside our community!"

Learn more at www.umpomona.org and www.um-cp.org.

CATHEDRAL IN THE LIGHT is a seven-year-old outdoor worshipping community located in Greenfield, Massachusetts, which meets on the town common every Sunday throughout the year. Designed to be a sustainable "poor church" in the radical tradition of Jesus, the community's opening eucharistic acclamation is: "This table is not your table, this table is not my table, it is God's table — and therefore no one is excluded." Comprised of rich and poor, young and old, homeless and homed, Cathedral in the Light is a dramatically diverse worshipping community that celebrates our human commonalities in a world increasingly fractured by systemic injustice and poverty.

"Come for worship, Stay for the meal" is a slogan that describes Cathedral in the Light's fundamental mission to nourish both body and soul. By it's open, fluid Eucharistic liturgy, the community gathers to bring hope to often solitary lives, as well as a hot, nutritious meal on a day of the week when there are no other community meals. And as an outdoor worshipping community, Cathedral in the Light bears witness to the love of God in a broken world.

Learn more at: www.cathedralinthelight.org.

CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE JUSTICE AT LYNDALE UCC in Minneapolis, MN is a bold ministry of the 135 year old congregation seeking to create spiritual community in the midst of intersectional, local activism. Since the spring of 2015, the Center for Sustainable Justice has helped build the movement of religious leaders and communities working together on LGBTQ, racial, food and climate justice in the Twin Cities and across the Midwest. Their work places particular emphasis on work at the intersections, relationship-building over the long-haul, connecting and building coalitions between people

and organizations. The Center for Sustainable Justice convenes, organizes, learns, and offers healing in the presence of their communities.

Learn more at www.lyndaleucc.org/justice.

Launched in 2011, **MINISTERIO LATINO** in Oakland, CA is a faith community that welcomes and embraces Latinx immigrant, queer and trans people; affirms that they are sacred and beloved in the eyes of God; and equips, encourages and empowers them to do the sacred work of justice.

Ministerio Latino's growth will impact the community at large because it is an alternative to the narrowly conservative fundamentalist Christianity that promotes discrimination. Ministerio Latino tells the beaten and rejected "you are welcome here," and nurtures leaders who go from a place of spiritual strength to proclaim the good news of Jesus' unconditional love for all. Ministerio Latino heals and restores a persecuted community of faith, and it is light in the darkness. Meeting twice monthly, this community sustains people for their individual spiritual journeys, equipped by people who fully understand their intersectional experience.

Learn more at www.plymouthoakland.org.

Organized in 2004, **TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST — GARY, IN**, is a culturally conscious; Christ centered church, committed to the community. "Faith Into the Future," F2F, is a ministry endeavor that embodies our commitment to be a 7-day-a-week church, who praises God on Sunday and serves God's people every day. We are looking to take a refreshed and innovative approach to inspire lay people, particularly youth and young adults, to discern a Christian life and to be active in ministry work inside and outside of the church. We are looking to intentionally focus on leadership development and faith-community coalition building to equip disciples to live out a life of effective outreach and social justice. We will accomplish this through purposeful programmatic mentorship within the church and strategic coalition building outside the church.

TUCC welcomes all who love the Lord, regardless of education, background, or economic situation, and invite all God's children to share in the hope, joy, and the labors of the Lord. We are committed to advancing an inclusive, open, and affirming Christian message one person at a time. Yet, TUCC-Gary remains committed to its founding charge and is an African American congregation that is unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian. The primary ministry focus of F2F is to teach this inclusive ethic while equipping lay leaders to engage, develop, and work alongside the next generation of Christian disciples within the community outreach, social justice context. Leadership and members are clear that sustainable growth and substantive community impact springs from a vision of inter-generational collaboration, diversity, and a focus on the future of the church.

Learn more at www.tuccgary.org.



UCC CAMPUS MINISTRY AT UIUC

welcomes undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds, inviting them to come together and explore questions of faith and life, connect with each other and the wider community, and have fun. The ministry meets students where they are and walks with them as they grow. UCC Campus Ministry UIUC nests with the 161-year-old Community UCC in Champlain IL and is one of the most vital college ministry-congregational connections that we know.

Through worship, weekly fellowship and meditation, eating at and volunteering with CUCC's dinner ministry Jubilee Café, Sunday lunches in congregant's homes, fall and spring retreats, Spring break service trips, and "Campus Home" away from home relationships, UCC Campus Ministry UIUC Students explore questions of faith and life; cultivate a commitment to service; grow individually and in community; connect with each other, caring adults, and the wider world; and launch into the world looking for a community of faith to which they can belong.

Learn more at www.community-ucc.org/campus-ministry.

This report, and support to these ministries, are made possible by your donations to Strengthen the Church offering. Thank you for your generosity.

For more information, go to ucc.org/meetingmeasuring.

Written and compiled with gratitude for all the ministries who constantly are teaching us:

*Rev. Dr. Chris S. Davies
Team Leader of Faith Education, Innovation, and Formation*

*Dr. Erica Dollhopf, Ph.D
Director of the Center for Analytics, Research and Data*





700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115
ucc.org